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Online Resources for Organizing Your Remote Office

There are terrific resources on the Internet that provide tips for getting the most out of your remote office space. The four links below contain useful content to assist you with setting up your office space in the most efficient and professional manner.

Sound and Noise Control In the (Remote) Office
http://www.soundproofing.org/infopages/office.htm

Your Home Office... Tips On How To Utilize Your Home Office / Set Up For Success
http://realtytimes.com/rtnews/rtcpages/19990721_hmoffice.htm

Exercise (time will vary)

Review the above links for best practices and then complete this exercise:

1) Arrange your remote office for maximum efficiency and comfort.
2) Establish a noise-free and distractions-free workspace.

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Time Management

Time management skills are essential in any business but are especially important for those engaged in the provision of contact center services ("CSR Services") from remote locations.

Time management is about effectively managing one's time. At a deeper level, time management is about planning, prioritizing, and executing the tasks for which we are responsible, in a way that is productive and efficient. Time management is not about being busy - it's about producing results within the constraints of a demanding schedule.

Time management strategies and tips will help you increase your productivity and stay calm, especially if you have several clients, a family and other life activities to attend to.

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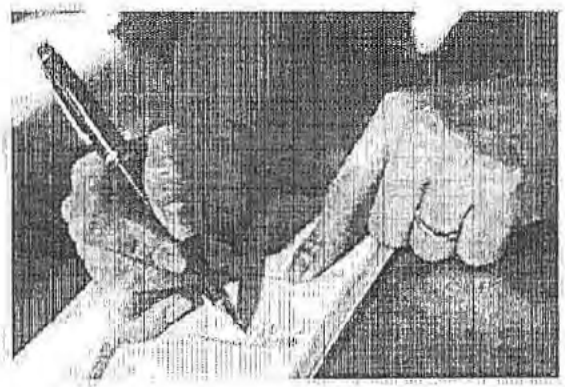
Time Management Continued

To effectively provide remote CSR services, you must start with planning. Planning is a critical skill because we don't always have a single or static list of items for which we're responsible, nor do the items carry equal weight in terms of importance or urgency. Our ability to efficiently manage our time takes into account the different types of events/activities that occur in any given day.



According to *Pareto's Principle*, or the 80/20 rule, roughly 80 percent of unfocused effort generates only 20 percent of results, and the remaining 80 percent of results are achieved with only 20 percent of the effort.

Appropriate time management and planning can change this to ensure that you concentrate as much of your effort as possible on the high payoff tasks. This ensures a greater reward. Let's look at some specific tips.

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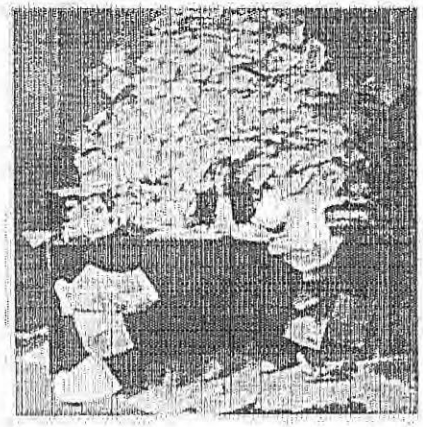
Time Management Tips



Here are some tips to help you, as a Client Support Professional employed by an Independent Business, manage time and improve productivity:

Plan:

- Even the most successful professional needs help handling all they need to accomplish.
- Planning your day in advance is a great way to be efficient and will help you feel more in control of your life.
- Write a to-do list.
- It is best to set a specific time of day for planning.
- Some people plan the night before; others plan first thing in the morning and others at the very end of the day.
- There's no real advantage to one time over another, other than your own personal preference. Basically, whichever time you can commit to every day is the time you should use for planning.

Prioritize:

- To be effective with your time, you have to prioritize in order to ensure you complete the most important tasks.
- When you create your to-do list, make sure you take time to not only list the items that require action, but also place a character or numeric naming convention to assign priorities to each

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task.

Delegate:

- Take a look at your to-do list and consider what you can eliminate or delegate to someone else.

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Time Management Tips Continued

Get plenty of sleep and exercise:

- Improved focus and concentration will help improve your efficiency.

Take a break:

- Servicing different clients back to back is not a good idea. It is stressful and difficult to change mindsets so quickly. Back-to-back logins are not advisable because you either would have to sign out early from one client to log into the second client on time or log in late for the second client.
- We recommend that Client Support Professionals take at least a half-hour break between clients.

Don't over-schedule yourself:

- Know your limits.
- Make sure you find a balance between work and family.
- You should carefully analyze the amount of time that you can dedicate to a client prior to scheduling. You want to avoid having to release hours as this will have a negative impact on your performance metrics.

Use your downtime productively:

- If you're having a slow day and not logged into a client, take advantage of the downtime.
- Review your course materials. There is always room for learning.

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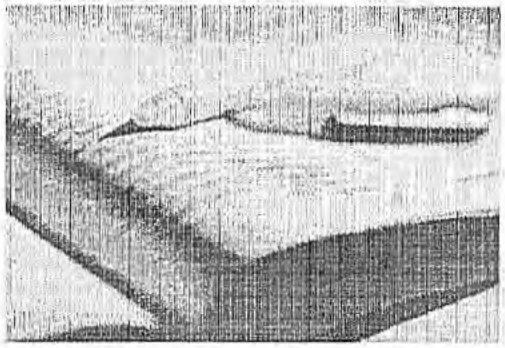

Clickhere to print Time Management Tips.

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Time Management Work and Family

Unless you are living alone, working as a home-based CSR Service provider means you and your family need to make a number of decisions about how home-based work will impact your family.

The following are some things for you to consider with your family:

- Where in your home will you set up your workstation?
- What hours do you need for uninterrupted work?
- When will you be "available" for your family?
- Will dinner time still be family time?
- Will you work on the weekends?

TIP

You will probably notice some changes in how you relate to family and friends when you begin to work from home.

Your success will be influenced by how well you manage the transition with family and friends.

In her book, *The Home Office Solution*, Alice Bredin encourages those who work in a home office environment to be open and realistic with themselves and with their families. The author cautions that

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you must generate support for this new endeavor which will undoubtedly affect all lives involved. Such a venture will impact money, space, household responsibilities and time spent with family.

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Time Management
Child Care Options

If you have children, deciding how you will manage their care and work from home is one of your most important family decisions. Be mindful that you must find a childcare solution that fits your budget and your children's needs.

Here are some of the most common ways to take care of your children while you build your business from home:

1. **Hire a baby-sitter:** This is probably the most common but also the most expensive option.
2. **Childcare Co-op:** Find a group of work-at-home parents and swap off childcare duties. The great thing about this option is it is free. The downside is that you will have to give up work time to handle other people's children.
3. **Trading or Mom-swapping:** This will involve you and a good friend trading off childcare days. Make sure you define when you will take the other child and when they will take

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yours. You will also want to make sure the children like each other and get along well.

4. **Sitter Sharing:** Share a sitter with a friend. You can have the sitter watch both kids at the same time and split the cost or use the sitter on alternate days. Make sure that you have a written agreement on how the sitter is used and what you will be paying to avoid any unseen complications.
5. **Day Care:** Finding the right day care center can be a rewarding experience for both you and your child. Ask other working parents for referrals and then visit the centers to see if you and your child get a favorable impression. Having peace of mind knowing your child is well cared for will allow you to focus on your job.

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Time Management
Child Care Options Continued

If you opt to have someone care for your children at home during the hours you provide service to your clients, writers at Green-Office.com suggest the following:

1. Set up a separate space for the home office with a door that can be closed so that your children cannot interrupt you.
2. Say goodbye in the morning just as if you are leaving the house.
3. Talk to your children about your work schedule. Inform them you will be working while a baby-sitter spends time with them.
4. If possible, set structured schedules. Your children can adapt to routines more easily.
5. Encourage the baby-sitter to take your children to the park or out on walks during the hours you provide service.
6. Set the rules for expected behavior and explain under what circumstances and how frequently you can be interrupted.
7. Work with the baby-sitter to find interesting activities for your children.
8. Reach out to other parents who are working from home for validation and support on the challenges of working at home.

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Time Management Work and Friends

Once you have the support of your immediate household, you might think your CSR service activities are safe from interruptions. However, what will you do about your relatives who visit every year at this time? How will you handle your neighbor who borrows things on a moment's notice from your pantry? Or, how can you ask your best friend to stop calling in the evening without losing that friendship?

Here are some suggestions on creating boundaries:

- Set specific office hours.
- Stick to them. Unless there is an emergency, family and friends should not disrupt you during work hours.
- Create a policy of things you will not do during work hours, especially if they distract you from work (watching TV, talking on the phone, paying bills, etc.).
- Do NOT conduct personal business in your workspace. Place your personal telephone in a room other than the one where you work.

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Time Management Stress Reducers

Taking care of customers requires a great deal of time listening to them and helping them get what they need. Dealing with upset, angry or stressed customers who are less than satisfied with the service they received thus far requires patience, empathy, and above all, it requires you to be cordial throughout the exchange.

To maintain your energy level and minimize your level of stress, here are some simple suggestions.

According to Anderson and Zemke in their book, **Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service**, mastering the art of calm keeps you and your customers happy. They suggest these 10 stress reducers:

1. **Breathe**. Deep breathing corrects the imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide which helps to control panic thinking and feelings of stress.
2. **Smile**. Smiling is contagious. You'll simply feel better by smiling.
3. **Laugh**. A sense of humor can actually prevent stress.
4. **Let it Out**. Make an appointment with yourself to go outside and let it out.
5. **Take a One-Minute Vacation**. Create a peaceful place in your mind and go there between calls.
6. **Relax**. Try isometrics. Tensing and relaxing your muscles will help to calm you.
7. **Do Desk Aerobics**. Exercising pumps endorphins through your body. Endorphins help to give you a sense of well-being. Click on the link below to print some desk aerobic exercises.
8. **Organize**. Organizing gives you a sense of control and lessens your stress levels.
9. **Talk Positive**. Find a cyber buddy to share your customer stories with using positive talk.
10. **Take a Health Break**. Walk outside, read a chapter in a good book, eat a healthy snack, drink water or simply sit with your eyes closed for a few minutes.

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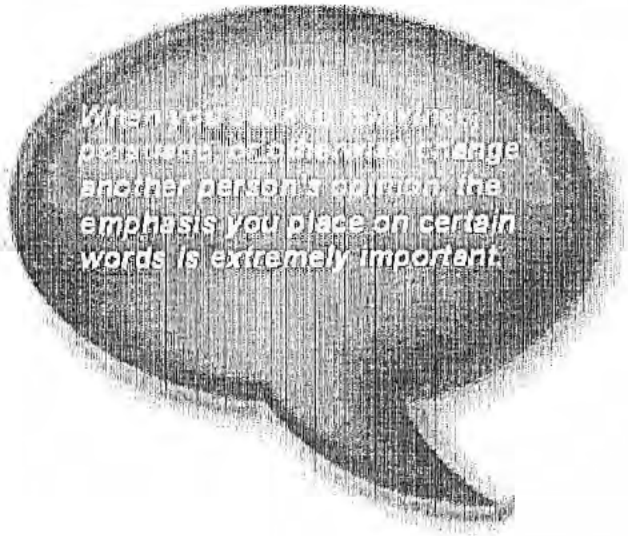
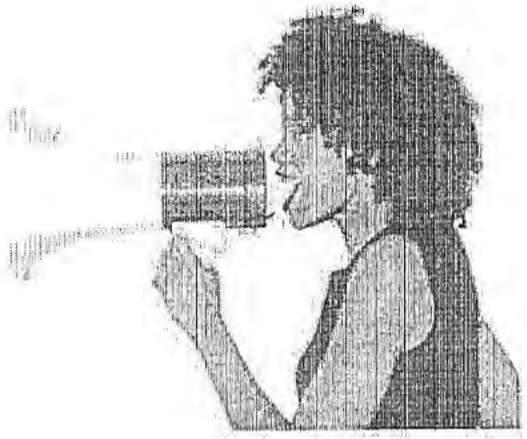
Professional Language: Using Emphasis

Proper emphasis of words and phrasing is very important to your work as a Customer Service Representative (CSR). We will spend some time on techniques to help you become a master speaker.





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Professional Language: Using Emphasis Continued

What happens when you emphasize words in a sentence? When emphasis is added, it reveals feelings and emotion in the communication.

What are the characteristics of an emphasized word?
Click on the arrow to learn more.

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Proper Inflection (Emphasis) Implies a Contrast

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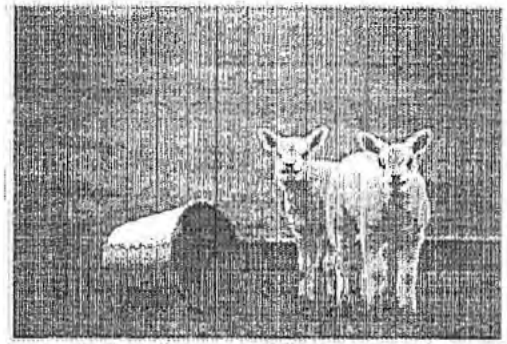

Using inflection to emphasize certain words will cause that word to be contrasted with something else in the sentence. Notice how a simple change in inflection changes the meaning of a simple line from the nursery rhyme *"Mary had a little lamb."*

Example:
By placing extra ***weight*** to the word "Mary" in the sentence Mary had a little lamb; it definitely asserts that Mary had the lamb versus someone else.

Mary had a little lamb.	Mary, not Tom or Nancy, had the lamb.

Directions: 1) Read aloud the line from the nursery rhyme on the left, placing inflection where indicated.
2) Drag the meaning that makes sense into the space next to the appropriate line.

Read aloud for inflection.	Place the sentence that matches the meaning here.
Example → Mary had a little lamb,	Mary, not Tom or Nancy, had the lamb.
Mary had a little lamb,	
Mary had a little lamb,	
Mary had a little lamb,	
Mary had a little lamb,	

The lamb was little, not medium sized or big.

She had it once, but she does not have it now.

She had one, not two, and not 'the' lamb.

It was a lamb, not a dog or another animal.

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Enunciate for Understanding - Try It!

It is critical that you enunciate clearly when speaking with customers.

The key to enunciating is to ensure your vowels and consonants are clearly articulated.

Practice makes perfect. When you are able to "clearly" and quickly say each of the lines below ten times, then you will be ready for the Broadway stage!

Click on the arrow to try it now and then practice often to become a master.

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Avoiding Empty Language

Empty language refers to words that fail to persuade, encourage, or excite someone.

Examples: *"Er, uh, ah I kinda thought you might... "*

Many of us use empty language without even knowing it. Awareness is the key to avoid empty language pitfalls and is the first step toward becoming a more persuasive speaker.

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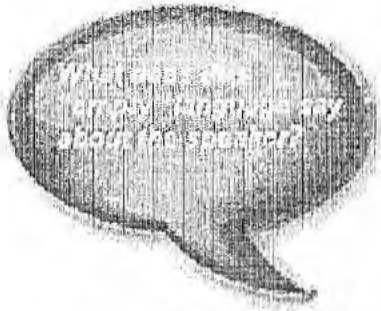
Avoiding Empty Language Continued



"Yes, er, well I thought that you might, if you want to, that is, think a bit about these, um, ideas that I sort of had. I'm sorry but I did want to, well, er, to let you, um, know that I am trying to, umm, help you if I can."

What does empty language such as the example above indicate about the speaker? Click on the arrow to learn more.

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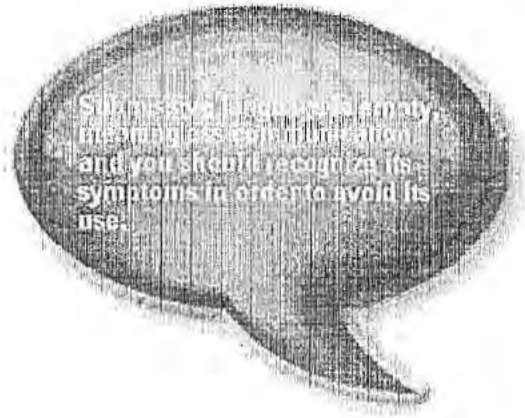
Submissive Language



Submissive phrase:	Bad Examples	Good Examples
I was just...	I was just calling, I was just thinking, I was just saying...I was just wondering	I'm calling. I was thinking.
May I...	May I have your name / speak to...I was just wondering if you'd give me your name?	Your name, please? I'm calling to speak to...
I was wondering.....	I'm just thinking that...Well, my view is still.....	It makes sense to me. What do you think about XXX?

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Taking The Mystery Out of Tone

The sound of your voice and the tone you convey are extremely important indicators of how successful you will be as a CSR.

Tone speaks volumes about you to the customer and it reveals the emotion behind words.

To achieve a confident and "can-do" tone, always maintain a professional manner that matches the style, pace, and volume of the customer you are speaking with.

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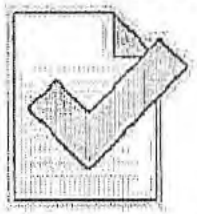
⊞ CSP - 101 Blended Delivery TP

Learning Check



To the customer, you are the company. If your voice and the impression you give the caller is offensive, it causes the customer to have a negative impression of the company.

- ○ **(A)** True
- ○ **(B)** False

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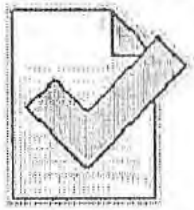
Learning Check



What are the characteristics of an emphasized word? Select all that apply.

- ☐ **(A)** One syllable is pronounced louder or softer than other syllables.
- ☐ **(B)** The pitch goes up or down from a previous word.
- ☐ **(C)** The pitch goes up or down from a subsequent word.
- ☐ **(D)** A word may be spoken very slowly.
- ☐ **(E)** A word may be spoken very quickly.

Submit

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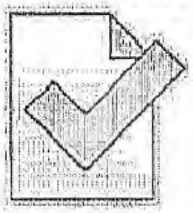
Learning Check



Which of the following are considered submissive language? Select all that apply.

- ☐ **(A)** I was just thinking that... uhm... we could...
- ☐ **(B)** That makes sense! Let's...
- ☐ **(C)** May I speak to...
- ☐ **(D)** I was calling to talk to you about...
- ☐ **(E)** I kinda thought that you might...

Submit

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Electronic Communication as Customer Service

E-mail is a powerful communication tool to strengthen a company's image and deliver increased customer confidence.

Your service contract may require that you communicate with customers both by phone and via electronic communication (e-mail and/or live chat).

For the company to successfully deliver its message, the e-mails and chats that you write must be designed for optimal positive effect. This means that the e-mail or live-chat communication you deliver must be both clear and concise.

This lesson will assist you in delivering written communication that is customer focused, specific and professional.

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Acceptable Abbreviations

Can you read this: "Abr shd B usd vy spgly"? It is difficult to read, and comprehend, isn't it? It's actually shorthand for this sentence:

Abbreviations should be used very sparingly.

Abbreviations are difficult to read and should be used only on occasion.

Your email or chat communications should always be written in complete sentences with abbreviations kept to a bare minimum.

The abbreviations chart below will point out the acceptable and unacceptable abbreviations to use in your daily electronic communications. As you can see, there are few instances when abbreviations are acceptable.

Acceptable Abbreviations	Unacceptable Abbreviations – DO NOT USE	
FYI (for your information)	**LOL** (laughing out loud)	**BRB** (be right back)
NYC, FL, LA (states or recognizable US cities)	**FWIW** (for what it's worth)	**NP** (no problem)
PC (personal computer)	**PCM** (please call me)	**OMG** (oh my God)
VIP (Very important person)	**W8** (wait)	**VM** (voice mail)
	B4 (before)	**BFN** (bye for now)

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Response Time: Chat or E-mail

If you are servicing with a client application that requires you to service the customer via live chat, then you are required to respond quickly.

For e-mail communications, you will have to gauge your response time to ensure it is appropriate to the customer's request. If the customer's request is time-bound and requires immediate attention, then of course, respond with haste.

We'll look at specific e-mail and chat handling times next.

To service your customers via chat, you will be chatting in "real time" (messages immediately appear). This means that you must answer immediately to customer requests just as though you were speaking on the phone.

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Handling Time: Chat or E-mail

Let's review what we consider acceptable response times:

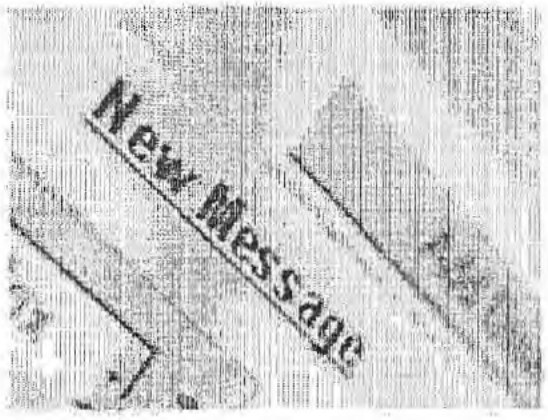
E-mail:

- Answer e-mails within 4 hours (unless urgent, or time-bound).

Chat:

- Respond immediately.

These response times are client specific. Some clients may require response times less than four hours for e-mail.



In the age of phone-text messaging, customers that you chat with may use "text messaging shorthand" when chatting with you. Please remember that your live-chat responses must be written in complete sentences.

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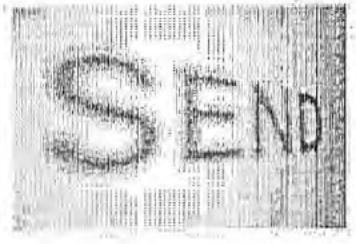
Salutations: Chat or E-mail

An important aspect of e-mail correspondence is the salutation. And, just like a hand-written letter, e-mails should be opened with a greeting such as:

- **Dear Dr. Jones, or**
- **Dear Mrs. Jones,**

The salutation in a chat conversation is generally not as formal as an e-mail salutation. Your chat should begin with a friendly greeting such as *Hello Mr/Mrs.* Customer and should continue naturally just as if you were actually speaking to the customer. The best rule of thumb concerning chat is to keep a friendly, conversational tone that is at all times professional. Let's review some tips:

- Avoid using *Sir* or *Mr.* or *Mrs.* unless you are absolutely certain of the gender of the customer.
- Likewise, be careful of using *Miss* or *Mrs.* unless you know the preference of the woman in question.
- In all cases, it is acceptable, when you don't know a reader's gender, to use the customer's full name in a salutation. For example, you might write *Dear Chris Jones* (in an e-mail), or *Hello Chris Jones* (in a chat) if you are unsure of Chris's gender.



An appropriate way to address an email is to mirror what the customer provided. If the customer signs the email as "Mr. John Smith", it is appropriate to use: "Dear Mr. Smith."

However, if the customer signs the email with "J. Smith", it would not be appropriate to greet the customer as "Mr." since you would not know the gender of "J."

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Visual Formatting

When you compose or respond to customer e-mails or chat, always keep the format of your message as professional looking as possible.

Do not use artwork or color within the text (unless your client requests a certain logo within the body of the message).

Review the good and bad examples of electronic message formatting.

Good Example

Bad Example

Sign **your name** on **all** e-mails. The recipient of the e-mail will only see your email address in the header so make sure to include your full name.

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Visual Formatting

When you compose or respond to customer e-mails or chat, always keep the format of your message as professional looking as possible.

Do not use artwork or color within the text (unless your client requests a certain logo within the body of the message).

Review the good and bad examples of electronic message formatting.

Good Example **Bad Example**

Good Example:

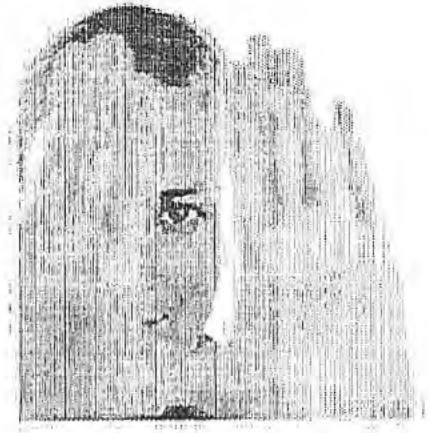
Dear Ms. Anderson

Your email to explain your concerns about your bill was appreciated. We reversed the charge and issued a credit of $1.13 to your account.

Thank you again for contacting us. It is our pleasure to service your needs.

Sincerely,

Your name,
Your company name



Sign **your name** on **all** e-mails. The recipient of the e-mail will only see your email address in the header so make sure to include your full name.

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Visual Formatting

When you compose or respond to customer e-mails or chat, always keep the format of your message as professional looking as possible.

Do not use artwork or color within the text (unless your client requests a certain logo within the body of the message).

Review the good and bad examples of electronic message formatting.

Good Example **Bad Example**

Bad Example:

Hey there, Ms. Anderson:

Thanks. We gave you a credit on your statement!!!! WE REVERSED THE CHARGE AND ISSUED YOU A CREDIT OF $1.13. Cool, HUH?

Thanks!

Your Name!

Sign **your** name on **all** e-mails. The recipient of the e-mail will only see your email address in the header so make sure to include your full name.

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Visual Formatting: Spacing, Bold, and Italics in Chat or E-mail

Let's review some additional formatting tips. Click on each arrow to learn more.

Spacing after periods

Spacing after periods:

It is acceptable to use one or two spaces after a period. This sentence demonstrates two spaces. This is how one space after a period looks. Regardless of which spacing you choose, as long as you use it consistently, it will be correct.

Using **Bolded** fonts

Using *Italics*

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Visual Formatting: Spacing, Bold, and Italics in Chat or E-mail

Let's review some additional formatting tips. Click on each arrow to learn more.

Spacing after periods

Using **Bolded** fonts

Using bolded fonts:

Only use bold fonts when it is necessary to give special meaning to a particular word. Never use bold fonts to indicate a negative feeling toward something or someone. Bolded fonts are, for the most part, unnecessary and you should avoid them whenever possible.

Using *Italics*

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Visual Formatting: Spacing, Bold, and Italics in Chat or E-mail

Let's review some additional formatting tips. Click on each arrow to learn more.

Spacing after periods

Using **Bolded** fonts

Using *Italics*

Using italics:

It is acceptable to use italics when referring to a book title. For instance, a great book on the subject of e-mailing in the 21st century is a book titled: *Send: The Essential Guide to E-mail for Office and Home*, by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe.

When referring to the title of a book, movie, play or academic research paper, it is also acceptable to remove the italics and underline the title: Send: The Essential Guide to E-mail for Office and Home, by David Shipley and Will Schwalbe.

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Visual Formatting: Font Size, Color, Type and Capitalization

Let's review some additional formatting tips. Click on each arrow to learn more.

Using Color

Font Size

Font Type

Capitalization

Using Color:

In business e-mails, the use of a colored background, or e-mail palette, is generally not recommended or acceptable. However, if your Arise Client uses a special color or logo as part of their branding, it is perfectly acceptable.

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Visual Formatting: Font Size, Color, Type and Capitalization

Let's review some additional formatting tips. Click on each arrow to learn more.

Using Color

Font Size

Font Size:

The recommended font size in e-mail correspondence is 12 pts (points). A font size less than 12 pts is too small, and anything larger is considered loud or aggressive looking.

Font Type

Capitalization

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Visual Formatting: Font Size, Color, Type and Capitalization

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Using Color

Font Size

Font Type

Capitalization

Font Type:

Font choice can be a tricky thing. Many people love a "fancy" or snazzy font type. For business purposes, and for the sake of your reader's comprehension, use either of these font types:

Arial or Times New Roman or **Verdana**.

American readers, according to *Send: The Essential Guide to E-mail for Office and Home*, prefer the look of Arial more than any other word processing font. Therefore, it is highly suggested that you choose an Arial 12 point font.

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CAPS:

Use standard spelling and punctuation in an e-mail. Using all caps to convey a thought or a message LOOKS AND SOUNDS LIKE YELLING TO THE READER. Always be careful to keep your Caps Lock off when composing e-mail or chatting with a customer.

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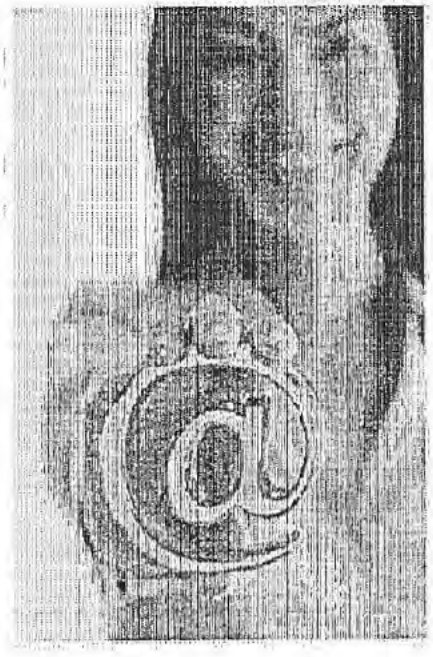
Explaining Next Steps

One of the best ways to ensure customer understanding is to clearly define next steps. Many times an explanation of next steps is as easy as saying: "I'll call you tomorrow at noon to discuss."

A next step clarification will be necessary for every customer situation. Be sure to explain to the customer if any tasks are needed before resolution of the issue and what will happen next.

Here are some examples of next steps. You will see how useful they are. We think you will recognize their value in providing superior customer care. Click on each to learn more.



Example One

Example Two

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CSP - 101 Blended Delivery TP

Explaining Next Steps

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Example One

Example Two

Example one:

Dear Mrs. Smith:

We have researched your concerns and conclude that we require more information from you before resolving this matter.

The following documents are required before we are able to take further action: Copies of your 1999 W2, and three (3) of your most recent bank statements.

Once I have received these items, I will take immediate action to bring this matter to conclusion.

Sincerely yours,

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